

# ABRAHAM LINCOLN

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AN ADDRESS

BY

HON. WELLS GOODYKOONTZ  
OF WEST VIRGINIA

DELIVERED AT HARPERS FERRY, W. VA.  
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 1920

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INTRODUCTORY BY MR. ECHOLS

Mr. ECHOLS. Mr. Speaker, under the leave granted to me to extend my remarks in the RECORD I include an address delivered by Hon. WELLS GOODYKOONTZ at Harpers Ferry, W. Va., on Sunday, February 8, 1920.

The address is as follows:

When Judge Tracy L. Jeffords, your distinguished fellow townsman, whom I have known for years, and whose splendid reputation is as well known in southern West Virginia as it is here or in the city of Washington, came to the Chambers of the House of Representatives and on your behalf extended the invitation to visit your peaceful and restful and historical community and to deliver an address upon the life and character of Abraham Lincoln I did not hesitate to accept the invitation, and so I am here, and glad to be here for several reasons.

First, I am glad to come into the district represented by my honored colleague, Hon. GEORGE M. BOWERS, of the city of Martinsburg, whose public life has extended over a period of more than 20 years and whose present high position—he being a member of the great Committee on Ways and Means—gives him as a representative of your district a position of great power and influence in his party and in the affairs of the Nation.

Secondly, I feel that I have been more than repaid for coming here in being privileged to listen to the

beautifully eloquent address delivered to-day by Dr. A. R. Snedegar, pastor of Bolivar Methodist Episcopal Church. He mentioned something that I had not before heard, namely, that the commissioners who negotiated the treaty of peace with Germany, after having considered the matter, expressly refused to allow their sessions to be opened with prayer, and he contrasted this action with that of the American patriots assembled in convention at Philadelphia for the purpose of writing a Constitution for the United States, pointing out that one of the things done was to order that their sessions be opened and closed with prayer.

Again, I am pleased to get back on the soil of West Virginia. Some time ago while traveling on a train through Ohio I met up with a man, evidently a toiler, judging from his horny hands and his corduroy suit, who was carrying a watch charm about as large as a silver dollar, and the legend on it in large letters was "West Virginia," with the motto and seal of the State. I said to the man, "You are from West Virginia," and he replied, "Yes; and it is the best State in the Union." Beneath the jacket of that man beats a patriotic heart and one that throbs with love for his State and his country.

The anniversary of Lincoln's birthday will occur on next Thursday. That day in West Virginia has been made a public holiday. The bill that was enacted into law was introduced by a gentleman who is now one of my neighbors—Senator Henry S. White, of Matewan. Senator White is a Union veteran of the Civil War, and in military and civil life has rendered a distinguished service to the State and Nation, and is still active and healthy in mind and body.

Now, proceeding to my subject: The position that a notable man will occupy in the history of the world can not be determined until long after the career of the man has ended.

Contemporary judgment may not be sound, yet history is accurate and just and will appraise and record at its true value the character and accomplishments of the man.

The balances in which the work of the celebrity is weighed may go up and go down, but in the fullness of time they will rest and indicate with precision the measure of that man's success.

Wherefore we are told that "though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small," which is only another way of saying that remorseless time, slow and plodding though it may be, in the end will inexorably arrive at a decision invulnerable to challenge.

Now, more than five decades have passed since Lincoln met his tragic fate, and he has been the subject of a thousand books. Investigators have exhausted every available source of information that might shed light upon the origin, character, development, and performances of this most remarkable man. Historians, statesmen, biographers, essayists, orators, teachers, and debaters all over the civilized world have meditated, reflected, and discoursed about Lincoln. But the verdict of history has been returned. That verdict was arrived at in an orderly way—the evidence of living witnesses, the circumstances of the times, the declarations of men from the different walks of life, the testimony of the dead, all were heard and considered, and judgment has been pronounced and entered thereon. That judgment may be reviewed, but it will not be reversed. It is final. It is the verdict and judgment of all mankind, recorded in the history of the world, and will stand for so long as time may last.

By that judgment Lincoln has been placed upon a pedestal alongside the very greatest men of all time.

Of continental mountain ranges there are to be found, usually at great distances apart, isolated peaks

that rear their lofty heads far above the general mass and the clouds and into thin ether.

And so, of the children of men, may we liken Lincoln to one of these mountain peaks, few in number, that stand pure and white, sublime and eternal.

The world has produced many men who are catalogued as great. Elbert Hubbard classified some of them as great reformers, great teachers, and the like, but, excepting Jesus of Nazareth, as to whom it would be sacrilegious to place in the category of men because of His Divine origin, and perhaps Washington, no greater man than Lincoln ever lived on earth.

It is not necessary to consider the much-debated question, Which was the greater, Washington or Lincoln? Washington led the forces of the Revolution to victory, helped to write the Constitution, and to organize the Government, and was our first Chief Executive, and shines in history as a star of the first magnitude. It is enough to say that all that Washington had fought for and gained—liberty, independence, and free government—all, I say all—were in imminent danger of destruction when Lincoln was called by his country to defend them. Turning the pages of history to discover the equals of Lincoln, what do we find? We find Julius Cæsar, at the head of the Roman legions, conquering a country to-day, going into winter quarters and waiting for good weather to come, in order that he might again by military force subdue some other nation, and thereby extend the boundaries of the empire and the jurisdiction of Rome, bringing home loot and men to be slaves, but sowing the seeds of disunion that eventually brought about the disruption and disintegration of a degraded empire.

There was Napoleon Bonaparte, whose star appeared in the heavens at Austerlitz and set forever at Waterloo. What did he accomplish? That he was in all human probability the greatest military genius of the world is likely true, but with the exception of some

military roads and the "Code Napoleon" he left no legacy of value to posterity.

At this juncture, in order to refresh your memories, may I not call your attention to the salient facts relating to the birth, life, and death of Lincoln. I think that a brief textbook on Lincoln should be prepared and admitted as a part of free school education. The Civil War is now sufficiently in the distance to permit this to be done without the slightest opposition from any section of the country, for the people of the South have long since fully realized not only that the preservation of the Union and of free government were necessary to their happiness, but also, had Lincoln lived, many of the vicissitudes through which they passed in the dark days of the reconstruction would not have been.

Lincoln's parents, his father, Thomas, and his mother, Nancy Hanks, came from Rockingham County, Va.; their families migrated about the same time to Kentucky; they were married in the latter State; they settled on Nolins Creek, and there in a log cabin, on February 12, 1809, was born Abraham Lincoln. Poor were his parents. Wretched were their environment. The land was poor, just one little rye field. The thriftless father, who could neither read nor write, planted a few fruit trees, never paid for the land, and four years later moved over to another place on Knobs Creek; three years later, when Lincoln was 7 years of age, the father moved his family, taking with him a few pots and pans and a quantity of liquor, into Indiana, where he settled on Little Pigeon Creek, in Spencer County; two years later the mother, at the age of 34, died. Speaking of her, Lincoln tenderly said, "All that I am or hope to be I owe to my mother"; when 11 years of age Lincoln walked 9 miles to and from school; when he was 20 he was known as a backwoods orator. In 1830 Lincoln moved with his father, the latter having taken a second wife in the person of

Sarah Bush Johnson, this time to Macon County, Ill. Lincoln on this journey drove the ox team which drew the family and its scanty possessions. The wagon wheels were without spokes, being rounded blocks of wood sawed from the trunk of a tree with a hole in the center for the axle.

When Lincoln was 21 he made a trip on a flatboat to New Orleans, and there witnessed a slave auction, which made a powerful impression upon his mind. Returning home he was chosen as captain of a company of volunteer soldiers in the Black Hawk War.

At various periods of his life Lincoln found employment as a clerk in a store, merchandising on his own account, deputy surveyor, postmaster, ferryman, flatboatman, wood chopper, mauler of rails.

On September 9, 1836, Lincoln was licensed to practice law. He read only a few books, including the Bible, Shakespeare, and Blackstone's Commentaries on the law of England. He entered politics and served for four terms, from 1834 to 1842, in the Illinois Legislature. During this time, in 1837, he located at Springfield; after going there he became involved in a newspaper controversy with Gen. James Shields and accepted a challenge to fight a duel, which was aborted at the last minute by the intervention of friends. On September 20, 1843, he formed the law partnership of Lincoln & Herndon, which continued until Lincoln's death.

In 1846 Lincoln was elected to the lower House of Congress and served for one term. While in Congress he introduced a bill to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia. He did not stand for reelection to this office and resumed the practice of law at Springfield.

His father died in 1851, aged 73 years. In 1856 Lincoln became the leader in Illinois of the Republican Party.—Shortly thereafter he participated in the memorable joint debates with Stephen A. Douglas in a campaign for the United States Senate, resulting in

the election of Douglas. Two years later he delivered a famous address at Cooper Union, New York City.

On May 18, 1860, he was nominated for the Presidency by the Republican covention at Chicago, and on November 6 was elected, defeating John C. Breckinridge, John Bell, and Stephen A. Douglas.

On February 4, 1861, he delivered a farewell address to his neighbors at Springfield, went to Washington, and was inaugurated the sixteenth President of the United States.

On September 22, 1862, he issued his preliminary emancipation proclamation, and on January 1, 1863, the final form of that document.

On June 8, 1864, at Baltimore, he was again nominated for the Presidency and was elected, defeating George B. McClellan.

On March 4, 1865, he was inaugurated for a second term. On April 9, 1865, General Lee surrendered to General Grant at Appomattox, Va.

At 20 minutes past 10 on the evening of April 14, 1865, while attending a performance of *Our American Cousin* at Ford's Theater, in Washington, Lincoln was shot in the head by J. Wilkes Booth. He was carried to a house across the street, where he remained unconscious until he died the next morning at 22 minutes past 7 o'clock.

Thus briefly have I detailed in chronological order the more important events in the life of Mr. Lincoln. It now remains for me to deal in a broader way with our subject.

The first principle to be deduced—one that every school boy and girl should be impressed with—is that Lincoln succeeded in spite of every handicap; that although he came from lowly people, parents ignorant and lacking good birth; although he was a child of poverty and son of toil; although he was reared in the wilderness and on the frontier; although he was denied

the benefits of even a common-school education, yet that by his own effort he went from a log cabin to the White House.

The next lesson Lincoln's life should teach the youth of the land is that it is only under a free Government, a Republic, where such an opportunity exists, where birth and wealth and caste do not restrain, where every boy has an equal opportunity with every other boy to reach the very highest station in social, political, and industrial life.

The next lesson to be learned is the lesson of kindness. Gentle and courteous, considerate and sympathetic, yet withal firm, these were some of the attributes of Lincoln. Such characteristics were indicated by the following examples:

On the streets of Richmond, after the evacuation, he met an aged negro who took off his hat; thereupon Lincoln, with equal courtesy, lifted his own hat. Upon being asked why he took off his hat to a negro, he said he did not want a negro to be more polite than he was.

His tender-heartedness and sympathy were shown by his firm refusal to allow the execution of the death sentence imposed by courts-martial, and by his own words—"with malice toward none, with charity for all \* \* \*," to be found in his first inaugural.

As an evidence of his deep feeling, compassion, and sympathy for those afflicted with sorrow, permit me to read from the exquisitely beautiful letter which he wrote to Mrs. Bixby, the mother of five sons who had died on the field of battle:

I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement of the adjutant general of Massachusetts that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle. I feel how weak and fruitless must be any word of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I can not refrain from tendering you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save. I pray that our Heavenly

Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.

The next lesson is that of firmness of character.

Lincoln could never have been the great leader of men that he was had he lacked force of character. Even the gifted and polished Seward, his great Secretary of State and who at first assumed to take charge of and run the entire administration, was soon subdued and loyally followed his renowned leader. Lincoln was not a compromiser of questions affecting principles. Recognition of the Confederacy, involving disunion, was utterly abhorrent to his mind.

Lincoln had a goal, and in pressing forward to it had to deal with many impediments; these he sometimes removed, at other times he climbed over them, but if neither of these could be done he went around them; "plowed around," as he expressed it.

He had an object, and to that object he went as rapidly and assiduously as circumstances and conditions would permit.

His tenacity, his unswerving determination, is exhibited in his second inaugural address, where, with almost fanatical zeal, he said:

Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled up by the bondsman's 250 years of unrequited toil shall be sunk and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said 3,000 years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

I now come to the greatest element in the life and soul of Lincoln—his democracy.

Springing from the soil, he was the farthest thing in the world from an aristocrat or an autocrat; his past life, he said, quoting from Gray's *Elegy*, was but "the short and simple annals of the poor."

Christ was born in a manger at Bethlehem, and is described in the Bible as "A man of sorrows," and who went about doing good.

Lincoln's place of birth was no less lowly. His life was full of sorrow. He was an instrument for the accomplishment of good. When he loosened the shackles and set free millions of bondmen and gained for himself the name "The Great Emancipator," he did good, and when by the arbitrament of arms he saved from dismemberment and dissolution the union of States that had formed the Republic, founded by Washington and ruled by a democracy, he again did good.

The most perfect definition ever given of the word democracy is to be found in the brief address made by President Lincoln in dedicating the battle field at Gettysburg. As long as time shall endure the memorable words which he there uttered, remarkable for their beauty, for they were as chaste as the rhetoric of Aristotle, as they were for the profound and undying principles of government which they enunciated, will remain as an inspiration to all mankind, a never-failing spring where patriots may drink and renew their faith.

The address came at the conclusion of an oration by Edward Everett. The latter had been selected as perhaps the best qualified man in the country for such a task—highly educated, he had served as ambassador to England, Secretary of State, governor of Massachusetts, and United States Senator—he had made exhaustive preparation for the greatest effort of his life; and when he had spoken for two hours and sat down, amid great applause President Lincoln arose in response to a request from the committee to make "a few appropriate remarks" in dedicating the field to the dead.

The address had been partially written at the White House, but was not completed until he was at Gettysburg and about to start for the cemetery. The closing

sentences were hastily scribbled with a pencil. The address was delivered in the presence of 100,000 people. In it he modestly declared that the world would little note nor long remember what he said. In this statement we all know how vastly mistaken he was. In concluding my remarks it is fitting that I read you the address. It is as follows:

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that Nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place of those who here gave their lives that that Nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But in a larger sense we can not dedicate, we can not consecrate, we can not hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us; that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this Nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.





